

# Immigration

## **The four paths to becoming a US Citizen:**

- **Citizenship through birth in the US or its possessions or territories.**

- **Citizenship at birth through US Citizen parents**

- **Citizenship subsequent to birth through naturalization of one or both alien parents.**

- **Citizenship through naturalization.** The applicant must:

- have been a resident of the US for at least 5 years following admission as an LPR.
- have resided in the INS District in which the application has been filed for at least 3 months.
- maintain residence in the INS district in which the application has been filed between the time of filing for naturalization and the date of naturalization.
- have been physically present in the US or its territories for at least half of the 5 years of US residency.
- be of good moral character.
- demonstrate loyalty to the US as well as knowledge of the English language and fundamentals of American Government.
- be at least 18 years old.

Many noncitizens who join the US military do so intending to become a US citizen to attain some of these citizenship benefits: the right to vote, the right to hold public office, and eligibility for unlimited types of employment, including federal jobs, especially those requiring security clearances. However, an alien who has served in the US does not automatically become a US citizen. Still, there are special exceptions and or procedures for alien servicemembers to become a naturalized citizen.

## **Lawful Permanent Resident (LPR) Status**

While an LPR is not a US citizen, he or she has been granted two important rights: to live and work in the U.S., and to apply for citizenship after a set number of years.

An LPR is someone who:

- has a “green card;”
- has legally immigrated and received authorization to reside in the US permanently;
- has adjusted status to LPR while in the US; **or**,
- received an immigrant visa abroad and has been admitted as an LPR by the INS at a land, sea, or airport entry point.

## **How to obtain LPR status**

LPR status is required for every type of naturalization available to military members except for a naturalization based upon service during military hostilities. The preference system for family-sponsored immigration sets in effect “quotas” for immigration from each country yearly. Becoming an LPR is frequently the biggest stumbling block facing a military member. Only immediate relative status, such as being married to a US citizen, avoids the waiting of the visa preference system. Traditionally, there are three main ways to LPR status:

- family-sponsored immigration;
- employment-sponsored immigration; and,
- asylum and refugee status.

A fourth way to LPR status is through the US Department of State’s diversity lottery which allocates visas each fiscal year to applicants from certain “under-represented” countries in recent US immigration history. For military members and their families, family-sponsored immigration is the primary route to immigrating as an LPR.